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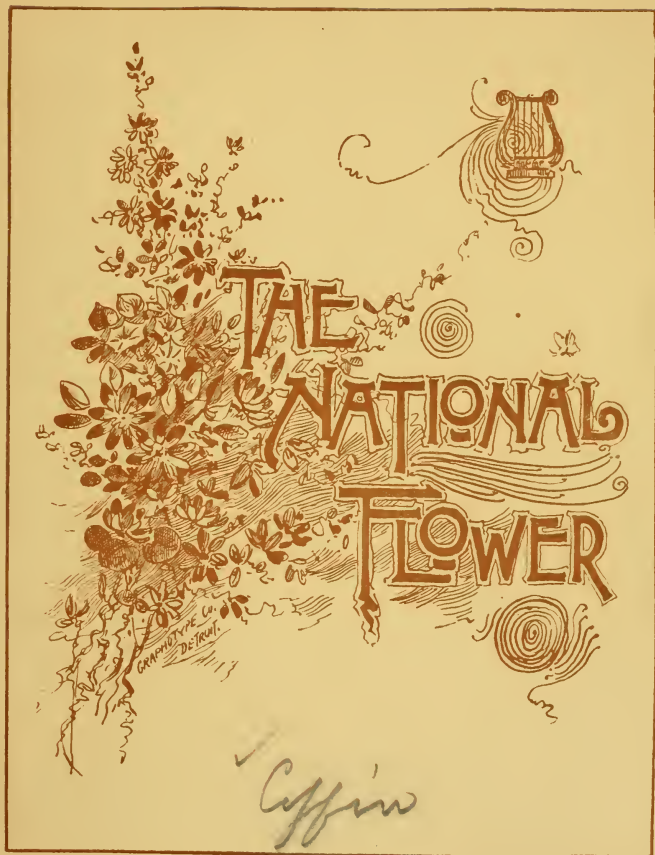




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THE



NATIONAL FLOWER



BY

Mary Stuart Coffin.

DETROIT:

John F. Eby & Co., Printers.

1890.



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AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED
TO THE
DETROIT FLORAL AND MUSICAL
CHARITY FESTIVAL,

APRIL 22, 1890.



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The ♦ National ♦ Flower.

Within the past year or two there has been more or less discussion upon the choice of a National Flower, and consistently with our popular method of testing public opinion, ballots have been taken expressive of individual preference. "The National Flower," as here presented, was suggested by the facts mentioned. The piece presupposes the interest that the Mythological Deities take in the affairs of mortals, and that the agitation has arrested their attention. Not to follow out the argument of the piece, the conclusion is that the final choice is known to the Deities, but withheld for supposed wise purposes.

EXPECTANT host on Mount Parnassus' crest,
The Gods assembled at Athena's hest,
Await to hear what she, the "azure-eyed,"
Conceals from all save Jove. In height of pride,
Gods, like to men of high intelligence,
Hide from inferiors their thought and sense.
She, daughter of great Jove, for wisdom famed,
Next him, of all the host of Heaven, is named,
Lovely, majestic, from her shining throne,
Surveys her Nymphs, and thus in gentle tone :
" Mortals once more our Flora's realms invade,

But she their certain choice has yet delayed,
 That Gods this people knowledge give, as dower,
 Ere they ordain the Nation's Symbol-Flower."
 Moves on the Floral Goddess now her glance,
 Kindly, though brightly keen as martial lance;
 Winsome and gladsome Flora sweet appears—
 Garlands of flowers, soft floating robes she wears—
 Her care the blessing of the fields below,
 To watch the Seasons as they come and go,
 Lest her young buds be blighted by the frost,
 Her empire, beauteous, on the Earth be lost;
 "Thou good and faithful to mankind, what thought,
 In honoring here our council, hast thou brought?"

THEN Flora, while perfumes from thousand flowers
 Distilled in dews, fall in ambrosial showers,
 And myriad silvery bird-notes ring,
 Blent with voice of rills from crystal spring:
 "Saviour, Protectress, thy thought we ever find
 Devoted to the welfare of mankind—

That neither Gods nor nations may deride,
 Help this, a weighty question, to decide.
 I am a simple Goddess of the Flowers—
 As such, invoke the aid of Higher Powers—
 To thee, Aurora, Aphrodite, I appeal,
 To Iris, Mnemosyne, to reveal
 What of high thought and sense in Flower Lore
 Each one possesses in abundant store.”
 Each fair celestial smiled at her request,
 Nor interest nor sympathy repressed.

TO Mnemosyne, Mother of the Muse,
 In grace, and thought, and wisdom e'er profuse,
 First do they list, for well they know her powers
 Who meet her in Parnassian bowers :
 “ Flowers are like mortals, and like Deities,
 With sense endowed, and varied qualities.
 None can the Nation's sentiment express,
 But blends its tints in harmony of dress,
 Like to its Banner floating on the air,

Entwining gracefully its colors rare.
It should some vital epoch illustrate,
The Ethics, Faith, or Grandeur of the State.
Grave as award of Princely Diadem
Should be a Nation's choice of Floral Gem ;
And more—for functions of your worldly Kings
Have but to do with gross material things,
While through its Thought and Poesy there roll
The finer pulse-beats of a Nation's Soul.
Long after Kings have mouldered into dust,
Thrones shattered, sceptres gnawed with rust,
A Nation's Sentiment its Badge portrays,
And to remoter time its thought conveys.
While Egypt's empire long since passed away,
Her floral emblem lives, breathes, speaks to-day.
Thus may Columbia's mighty Nation claim
A Symbol-Flower worthy of her fame.
Such the famed Lotus bloomed on Nilus' breast,
Her Sacerdotal Flower, her Nation's Crest—
Loved e'en late in her decaying hour,
Insignia of the Great Creative Power.

Thus doth the Fleur-de-lis of sunny France
 Hold for her nation sweet significance—
 A gift to Clovis, when upon his head
 The Holy Oil from Sacred Chrism was shed—
 Three Golden Lilies on an azure field,
 Borne earthward by a Goddess, heavenly shield.
 The badge of Erin's Isle, the emerald-gemmed,
 By gulf stream warmed and ocean hemmed,
 Examples forth her ruling faith divine,
 And blooms beside her altar and her shrine.
 St. Patrick saw, propitious to his toil,
 The Shamrock green, upspringing from the soil,
 Which served to 'lustrate to the island horde
 The Trinity united in one Lord.

Once in the Scottish camp the Norsemen spies
 Sought vulnerable point for night surprise,
 When one, incautious, on a thistle trod,
 Which, sharp and spiny, bristled o'er the sod ;
 Then imprecations loud the silence broke,
 Resounding through the camp—the Scots awoke,
 Swift to repulse th' invading enemy,

Nor Fates withhold decisive victory.
 The plant uncanny thus their saviour proved,
 Since holds with Scot its place as emblem loved.

England long years bore sanguinary fame
 When rival houses to her throne laid claim,
 Or red, or white, the color of her Rose,
 Betokened friends or fratricidal foes.
 At last sole offspring of each rival line,
 Invokes the peace that springs from Love divine,
 And Hymen bids them ever after own
 An undisputed right to England's throne.
 Thus speaks the Rose, on field, in hall or bower,
 Or white or red, her Unity and Power."

She ceased, and o'er the host the hush subdued,
 Tells the one thought with which it is imbued,
 That grave as 'stowment of its Diadem
 Should be a Nation's choice of Floral Gem—
 And more, proportioned as the Soul of Things
 Holds higher rank than rule of earthly Kings.

BRIGHT Iris now, the Messenger Divine,
 Of the Celestials in the female line,
 Her rainbow arching half the azure skies,
 The winds and seas her pledged auxiliaries—
 'Tis she who sheds the welcome rain in showers,
 Refreshing Flora's fields and groves and bowers :
 " Ofttimes as through aerial space I glide,
 I see a flower, in meadow, on hillside,
 Abloom by water course, in gardens fair,
 Bright as the clouds, transparent as the air,
 Of royal purple, cross of red and blue,
 Of snowy white, and oft of azure hue—
 By Gods endowed, its leaves float on the breeze,
 A wondrous trinity of trinities.
 Its leaves, like banners strewn upon the lea,
 Seem not unlike some ensign of the free,
 Nor deem that partial thought in this appears,
 Because my name this lily, Iris, bears."

NOW from the Ethereal Circle glances bright
 On Aphrodite fair, in waves alight,

As she is summoned by the Floral Quèen.
Arrayed in robes of soft transparent green,
Fair as when just arisen from the seas,
In presence of the waiting deities,
In voice companioned by the Lyre of Love,
She speaks, and well the list'ning Gods approve :
“ When floating idly on the waters breast,
And by the limpid element caressed,
I often touch the lilies fair and bright,
Like banner tint of red, and blue, and white.
As if inspired with purpose grand and high
To fill some space in Earth's economy,
The Water Lily, modest in its strength,
On lake, at sea, along the river's length,
Spontaneous blooms, a beauty and a joy,
Favorite alike of matron, maid and boy.
On lawn, in boudoir too, in urn or vase,
If careful hand will ooze and water place,
Ere scarce the fourth moon hangs her silver horn,
The lily bud will have a blossom borne.
The Clematis, sweet multitinted flower,

For the Madonna named the Virgin's Bower,
 Climbs lattice, trellis, sentries many a door—
 Centered in one disk, its petals four
 May aptly typify the Union crest,
 Shield both of North, of South, of East, of West.''
 As ceased her speech, in 'trancement of the hour,
 She had no thought to plead her special flower,
 The Rose, which Earth in rapture bore, when she
 Sprang from the deep, fair daughter of the sea.

AURORA, round whose supple figure clings
 Soft robes of dazzling white and purple, flings
 The reins of her fleet coursers prancing nigh,
 To Lucifer, her Herald of the Sky ;
 A lone star gleams above her tresses bright—
 She seems the essence of soft rosy light ;
 Gracefully leaning from her chariot gay,
 On this entrancing theme is heard to say :
 " Once hastening through a humid atmosphere,
 My mettled coursers shied, with seeming fear—
 As bolts of Jove the heavens rent amain,

They spurned obedience to the guiding rein.
 The storm clouds passed, my jeweled trumpet round
 Had slipped my girdle, fallen to the ground ;
 From mossy turf where it alighted, sprung
 A vine full leaved, with clustered blossoms hung ;
 Bell shaped, glittering with crystal dew,
 Like myriad jewelled trumpets formed anew ;
 Red, white, and blue, this symbol-flower,
 Called Morning Glory, from its natal hour—
 Symbolic blossom of the trumpet call
 That wakes to freedom and from slavery's thrall.
 On one where Dawn's tears copiously rest,
 I gaze, and gaze entranced—its royal crest,
 Vermilion, white and blue, it regal wears—
 Ofttimes a double coronal it bears—
 A crown of thorns, surmount with crown of glory,
 Of the sad Crucifixion tells the story.
 Indigenous it is to Western strand,
 A native of America's fair land—
 A common faith was carried to that shore,
 A common cross the varied peoples bore.

The cross once borne, now but remains the crown ;
 Than this no emblem could the Nation own
 More fit—a gift from Heavenly Power,
 Type of great love, celestial Passion Flower.”

TO Hermes now, the Goddess having ended,
 Whom her speech had graciously attended,
 They list. The Divine Messenger has brought
 From patriotic mortals, yet one thought :
 “ A requisite—the symbol-flower must bloom
 North, South, East, West, wafting its perfume,
 Nor its ancestral seed have crossed the sea—
 America must claim paternity.”

ATHENA then : “ This flower we’ll not decree,
 Though known, for prescient is the Deity.
 But yet one thought may fitly be conveyed
 By heralds in our livery arrayed ;
 But ere they earthward go, again we’ll hear
 What says our Floral Queen, now drawing near.”

THEN she, while Gods remote still closer press
 The Ethereal race, nor know of coyness :
 “Of choice expressed, each merit hath, we know,
 And if our judgment tardy seem, and slow,
 There need be no repine ; let this console—
 Varies that clime as tropic from the pole ;
 There blooms no plant, in vale, on mount, or plain,
 In torrid heat, unfolds upon the main,
 But right conditioned, with its needs supplied,
 Would shed its heavenly blossoms far and wide ;
 Each favored flower, America’s free soil
 The race or genus owns. But why despoil-
 Her claim, if otherwise ? Why scorn a flower,
 When e’en each chief executive in power
 His ancestry remote or near must claim
 From foreign source, if such her fame ?
 If only native flower may claim the place
 Where rests the right of an exotic race ?
 For let us not too strictly judge the hand
 That gained (no matter how) the Red Man’s land.”
 This said, the Gods approve with just applause
 The Floral Queen, thus speaking in her cause.

A THENA then : “ Hermes and Iris, I endue
You with the power these mortals to imbue,
With all the thought and varied lore this hour
Has seen evolved in Mount Parnassus' bower.
The choice of flower the Race Celestial wait—
The choice we'll honor with an after fête.”
This said, the Divine Messengers take flight,
Their feet encased in plumed sandals bright—
On shining wings expanded cleave the skies,
To bear this message from the Deities.



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